

AN AMERICAN DREAM WORLD

ROMANTIC REALISM 1930 -1955

**DOWNTOWN BRANCH
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
55 WATER STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10041**

JANUARY 30—MARCH 5

CATALOGUE

WMAA denotes works from the
permanent collection of the
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Measurements are in inches, height preceding width

BARBARA ADRIAN (1931-)
THE PORTRAIT OF HENRY PEARSON 1966
Oil on masonite, 19½x24
The Art Galleries, Southern Illinois University
at Carbondale

IVAN ALBRIGHT (1897-)
FLEETING TIME, THOU HAST LEFT ME OLD 1929-3
Oil on canvas, 30¼x20¼
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York;
George A. Hearn Fund, 1950

JOHN ATHERTON (1900-1952)
BLACK HORSE—IMAGINATIVE LANDSCAPE 1942
Oil on canvas, 37¾x52
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York;
Arthur H. Hearn Fund, 1942

HYMAN BLOOM (1913-)
THE ANATOMIST 1953
Oil on canvas, 70½x40½
WMAA

PETER BLUME (1906-)
LIGHT OF THE WORLD 1932
Oil on panel, 18x20¼
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PAUL CADMUS (1904-)
FANTASIA ON A THEME BY DR. S. 1946
Egg tempera on board, 13x13
WMAA

CLARENCE CARTER (1904-)
WAR BRIDE 1940
Oil on canvas, 35-5/8x53¾
Courtesy of Gimpel and Weitzenhoffer
Gallery

FEDERICO CASTELLON (1914-1971)
THE DARK FIGURE 1938
Oil on canvas, 17x26-1/8
WMAA

UNTITLED 1938
Oil on canvas, 11½x11½
Collection of Mrs. Federico Castellon

ALEX COLVILLE (1920-)
OCEAN LIMITED 1962
Oil and synthetic resin on panel, 27x47¾
Collection of William A.M. Burden and Company

JOSEPH CORNELL (1903-1972)
ROSE CASTLE 1945
Wood, paper, paint, mirror, twigs, tinsel, dust, 11½x14-7/8
WMAA; Bequest of Kay Sage Tanguy

EDWIN DICKINSON (1891-)
FOSSIL HUNTERS 1926-28
Oil on canvas, 96½x73¾
WMAA

PHILIP EVERGOOD (1901-1973)
THE NEW DEATH 1947
Oil on canvas, 37x31½
Courtesy of Terry Dintenfass Gallery

JARED FRENCH (1905-)
SUMMER'S ENDING 1939
Oil and tempera on canvas, 24¼x40¼
WMAA

THE ROPE 1954
Egg tempera on paper, 13½x14¼
WMAA; Charles F. Williams Fund

ADOLPH GOTTLIEB (1903-1974)
THE SEA CHEST 1942
Oil on canvas, 26x34
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

STEPHEN GREENE (1918-)
THE SHADOW 1950
Oil on canvas, 54x34
WMAA; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Emile Gordon Stoloff

LOUIS GUGLIELMI (1906-1956)
ONE THIRD OF A NATION c. 1938
Oil and tempera on panel, 30x24
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York;
Gift of New York City W.P.A., 1943

TERROR IN BROOKLYN 1941
Oil on canvas, 34x30
WMAA

During the 1940s and early 1950s many American artists were working in a figurative or representational mode of painting variously labeled Magic Realism, Surrealism, or Symbolic Realism. This type of romantic realism is not a single artistic style but rather a general sensibility, expressed in a variety of styles. It is not concerned with empirical reality or the popular values associated with the realist tradition. Neither is it concerned with the formal aspects of abstract art. Its reality is a symbolic and psychological one tied to subject matter. The power of its symbolism comes from the psychological associations it evokes through changing the context of this subject matter. Often the change is made on the subconscious, irrational level of dreams or fantasies, occasionally on the conscious level of allegory or metaphor. Whether its symbolism is generated on a conscious or on a subconscious level, the figurative techniques that express it are clearly conscious and considered.

This emphasis upon irrational imagery or mood grows out of various trends in modern European art seen in the work of the Symbolists, the Douanier Rousseau, the young Picasso, Giorgio di Chirico, the Dadaists, the German Neue Sachlichkeit painters, the Neo-Romantics, and the Veristic Surrealists, like Salvador Dali. The representational techniques are often derived from modern European precedents or from the work of the Italian or Flemish painters of the 1400s. They are largely traditional, unlike such techniques as automatic writing that led to the stylistic innovations of Abstract Expressionism.

Many romantic realist painters create symbols evoking feelings of the isolation of modern man, his vulnerability, and his hopeless attempts to control an irrational world, feelings strongly prevalent in America in the conservative period of the '40s and '50s. Ivan Albright has a morbid, subconscious fascination with the minute effects of time and decay. His biblically phrased titles seem almost a conscious ironic defense against the horror of his own vision. Clarence Carter and Alex Colville create psychological tension through juxtapositions of man and larger, more powerful, inscrutable and potentially threatening machines. For Attilio Salemmé, the terror of a modern inquisition lies in the enigmatic, machinelike quality of man himself. Louis Guglielmi embodies feelings of fear and helplessness in the image of the bell jar under which man huddles like some biological specimen. Many of these painters portray vast landscape spaces that dwarf the men within them.

Others, like Walter Murch, Joseph Cornell, Adolph Gottlieb, and Walter Stuempfig, concentrate more on the lighter side of the irrational, on the magical perception of objects and environments. Murch paints various mechanical devices in a style reminiscent of faded sepia photographs. These devices take on the mysterious, yet also strangely nostalgic, quality of totems from some earlier industrial age. Cornell's and Gottlieb's still lifes often take the simplest objects—seaweed, shells, mirrors, or twigs—and with them create a mood of tender poetic reverie and private dreams, far removed from the nightmarish mood seen more often in the work of their European Surrealist predecessors. Both with Gottlieb and with Philip Guston, it is fascinating to note the continuity of mood that is maintained into their earliest abstract works. Walter Stuempfig paints American landscapes as stage sets depicting the Roman countryside, in front of which are performed the great classical myths.

The romantic sensibility exemplified by the paintings in this exhibition received considerable attention from artists and the public during the 1940s and early '50s. In the 1930s when it first appeared in American art, it was overshadowed by the work of the Social Realists and the American Scene painters like Ben Shahn and Thomas Hart Benton. Since the mid-50s Abstract Expressionism and later developments have dominated the visual arts. This exhibition, then, offers a view of an often overlooked but significant phase of American art.

PHILIP GUSTON (1913-)
SOMERSAULT 1946
Oil on canvas, 38½x29¼
Collection of Joseph A. and Jessamine Monica
HENRY KOERNER (1915-)
VANITY FAIR 1946
Oil on canvas, 36x42
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HUGHIE LEE SMITH (1914-)
ABSENCE OF GAIETY c. 1962
Oil on canvas, 31½x48
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Clarke

WALTER MURCH (1907-1967)
THE CIRCLE c. 1948
Oil on canvas, 26x21½
The Brooklyn Museum, New York

BERNARD PERLIN (1918-)
THE LOVERS 1946
Gouache on paper on cardboard, 30x37¾
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

THE JACKET 1951
Casein tempera on cardboard, 28¼x19¼
WMAA; Wildenstein Benefit Fund

ALTON PICKENS (1917-)
CARNIVAL 1949
Oil on canvas, 54-5/8x40-3/8
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1951

WALTER QUIRT (1902-1968)
THE TRANQUILITY OF
PREVIOUS EXISTENCE 1941
Oil on canvas, 24-1/8x32
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Purchase 1942

KAY SAGE (1898-1963)
NO PASSING 1954
Oil on canvas, 54¼x38
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ATTILIO SALEMMÉ (1911-1955)
INQUISITION 1952
Oil on canvas, 40x63
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BEN SHAHN (1898-1969)
CHERUBS AND CHILDREN 1944
Tempera on composition board, 15x22-7/8
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HONORE SHARRER (1920-)
STILL LIFE AND GIRL c. 1950
Oil on panel, 6½x10¼
Courtesy of Terry Dintenfass Gallery

THE RECEPTION 1955-57
Oil on panel, 30x23
Lent by the artist

WALTER STUEMPFIG (1914-1970)
JUDGEMENT OF PARIS 1943
Oil on canvas, 28x36
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DOROTHEA TANNING (1915-)
PALAESTRA 1947
Oil on canvas, 24x17½
Collection of Jeffrey H. Loria

GEORGE TOOKER (1920-)
THE FOUNTAINS 1948-49
Egg tempera on pressed wood board, 23x23½
Courtesy of the Frank Rehn Gallery

GYPSIES 1969
Egg tempera on pressed wood board, 23x23
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joel W. Harnett

ROBERT VICKREY (1926-)
THE LABYRINTH 1951
Casein on composition board, 32x48
WMAA; Juliana Force Purchase

THE MONUMENT 1970
Tempera on masonite panel, 35-7/8x48
Courtesy of the Midtown Galleries

HANS WEINGAERTNER (1896-1970)
SEEN FROM THE GRAVE 1932
Oil on canvas, 40x34
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leo J. Dee

ANDREW WYETH (1917-)
BURNING OFF 1961
Dry brush on paper, 29x32
Collection of Mrs. Norman B. Woolworth

This exhibition has been organized by Catherine Coleman, New College-Hofstra University; Ruth Cummings, Boston University; Hillary Johnson, Cornell University; Janet Kardon, University of Pennsylvania; Linda Kent, University of California at Los Angeles; Robert J. Lamb, City University of New York Graduate School; Michael Leja, Swarthmore College; Abigail Turner, Sarah Lawrence College; Faythe Weaver, Ohio State University; and Charles Wright, Princeton University, students in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program.

The Downtown Branch Museum is operated under the direction of David Hupert, Head of the Whitney Museum's Education Department. The administrative coordinator is Toba Tucker.

The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art, located in the Uris Building at 55 Water Street, is supported by the business community of lower Manhattan. The Independent Study Program is supported by the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Museum is open 11-3 Monday through Friday. Admission is free.

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